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Via Electronic Mail

August 26, 2026

The Honorable Patricia Kelly
Santa Barbara County Superior Court
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
pkelly@sbcourts.org

Stacy Mezzetta de Cossio, Foreperson
Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
sbcgj@sbcourts.org

Re: 2025-26 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report, "Preparing for the Unthinkable: How are Santa Barbara County Schools Preparing to Prevent or Minimize the Effects of a Potential Mass Shooting?"

Dear Judge Kelly, Foreperson Mezzetta de Cossio, and Members of the Grand Jury:

The Santa Barbara Unified School District appreciates the opportunity to respond to the 2025-26 Grand Jury Report on school safety and preparedness for a potential mass shooting. Nothing matters more to us than the safety of our students and staff. We have invested substantially in the training, drills, physical infrastructure, mental health supports, and reporting systems that prepare our schools to prevent violence and respond effectively if it occurs. We welcome the Grand Jury's careful attention to this work and remain open to strengthening it.

One structural note framing several of our responses. Our campuses are open by design. They span acres of outdoor space, several include gardens and working farms, and our classroom doors open directly to the outdoors rather than onto interior corridors. Our communities treasure these campuses, and full perimeter fencing has never been part of their design. We secure them through layered measures suited to that design (supervision, cameras, front-office check-in and badging, signage defining school versus public space, classroom locks, and instantaneous communication tools) rather than through perimeter hardening. Several of the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations address physical access and perimeter security;

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Angela Braun, Executive Officer
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our responses below explain how our layered approach meets the goals of those items on campuses built for openness.

Our responses to each assigned finding and recommendation follow. The Grand Jury did not assign us Recommendation 1a, and we therefore do not respond to that item.

Finding 1: The Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO) provides County school districts training in identifying pathways to targeted violence, although attendance by employees of the various Santa Barbara County school districts in the SBCEO's School Safety Symposium is limited.

Response: Agree.

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts require administrative leaders to attend the School Safety Symposium in person at least once every two years.

Response: Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule. We will direct administrative leaders to attend the SBCEO School Safety Symposium, or equivalent school safety training addressing pathways to targeted violence, at least once every two years, beginning with the 2026-27 school year or the next available Symposium.

Recommendation 1c: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts encourage teachers and staff to attend the School Safety Symposium in-person, and if not in-person, access the online seminar annually.

Response: Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule. Beginning in the 2026-27 school year, or the next available Symposium, we will encourage representative teachers and staff to attend the SBCEO School Safety Symposium in person, or if in-person attendance is not possible, to access the online seminar or equivalent school safety training annually. Our encouragement will run through site-level communications and existing safety training expectations. As further evidence of our commitment to this direction, we already require all employees to complete annual mandated safety training, which reinforces core safety protocols across the entire workforce and supplements symposium attendance by representative teachers and staff.

Finding 2: Santa Barbara County school districts are compliant in creating Comprehensive School Safety Plans for their schools, but some staff require more information and training on safety protocols.

Response: Agree.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts train and drill all full-time campus personnel and students for campus safety at least once per semester.

Response: Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule. Each of our sites conducts campus safety drills at least once per semester, and site administrators report those drills through the CrisisGo platform. All fulltime campus personnel and students participate in the drills as part of site-level safety training. We will implement annual active shooter drills for personnel, beginning in the 2026-27 school year.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide written and verbal instruction to all temporary personnel, including substitute teachers, prior to their entering a new classroom location.

Response: Has been implemented. We provide substitute teachers and other temporary personnel with written and verbal instruction on classroom safety protocols before they enter a new classroom. Our substitute handbook includes an emergency procedures section covering fire, earthquake, threats, and other emergencies. School sites provide arriving substitutes with a site-specific packet containing their assignment and emergency preparedness information for the site. Each classroom is equipped with an emergency preparedness clipboard for use during an event. We continue to monitor site-level consistency in the distribution of these materials and update them as needed.

Recommendation 2c: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide quick reference situational cards and/or information posters conveying simple instructions for emergency response procedures in every classroom and in public rooms.

Response: Has been implemented. Emergency response posters are posted in every classroom and in public spaces across all our schools, providing clear, simple instructions for standard emergency scenarios.

Finding 3: While many Santa Barbara County school districts have a watch, listen, and report culture for enhancement of threat detection in their schools, not all schools have anonymous pathways for reporting threats or potential threats online or on campus.

Response: Disagree partially with an explanation. We cannot speak to conditions at other County schools. As applied to us, we have a watch, listen, and report culture supported by our Culture of Care framework (which begins with a Prevent step focused on building belonging at every school, followed by Recognize, Respond, Report, and Repair) and our Trusted Adult Framework training. We also provide an anonymous reporting pathway through Safe2SpeakUp, as further described in our responses to Recommendations 3a and 3b below.

Recommendation 3a: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts train school personnel on how to gain trust, understand healthy boundaries, and engage in strategic partnerships with community service groups to support student needs.

Response: Has been implemented. Our Trusted Adult Framework provides annual training to Family Engagement Liaisons, mental health clinicians, campus safety supervisors, and site administrators on building trusting relationships with students, understanding healthy boundaries, and engaging in strategic partnerships. Our Panorama survey measures student

and adult trusting relationships across TK-12, with a goal that every student identify at least one trusted adult (and ideally five). We use survey results to identify students who lack these connections and to intervene. We maintain partnerships with community service groups including Healing Justice, Gateway, AHA!, and Pacific Pride, which support students facing a range of needs.

Recommendation 3b: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts provide an anonymous reporting mechanism on school-provided devices, in addition to a drop box available on campus.

Response: Has been implemented. We provide anonymous digital reporting through Safe2SpeakUp, which is available on student devices and integrated with our CrisisGo platform. Safe2SpeakUp allows students and staff to report a full range of concerns anonymously (including safety concerns and equity-related incidents) and provides confirmation that the report has been received. Students use Safe2SpeakUp more than any other reporting channel. We complement it with our Culture of Care framework at every school, which begins with a Prevent step focused on building belonging and adult modeling that reduce harm before it happens, followed by Recognize, Respond, Report, and Repair. We have not deployed physical drop boxes, because our digital tools capture the same reporting function with better traceability, receipt confirmation, and student adoption.

Finding 4: School Resource Officers or Deputies are valuable in preventing or addressing potentially dangerous situations on campus, but many schools do not employ them.

Response: Disagree partially with an explanation. We cannot speak to conditions at other County schools. As applied to us, we take a deliberately different approach to safety personnel. In 2021, following principal input and community concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline, we eliminated our school-based officer position and redirected the funding to campus safety assistants and mental health clinicians. That decision reflects our considered judgment about what most effectively supports safety on our campuses. We continue to maintain working relationships with the Santa Barbara Police Department and the Sheriff's Office for consultation and response.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts have School Resource Officers (SRO) or Deputies (SRD).

Response: Will not be implemented, with an explanation. We will not implement this recommendation. On October 12, 2021, after extensive public comment and community engagement, the Board voted unanimously not to renew our contract for a School Resource Deputy and directed staff to reallocate the associated funding and develop alternatives for our high schools. That decision responded to national research, sustained input from students, particularly students of color who described feeling targeted, and from community members raising concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline. The reallocated funding has supported campus safety assistants who provide day-to-day supervision on our campuses, along with additional mental health clinicians who support students at the site level based on demonstrated

need. This service-model choice reflects our considered judgment about what best supports our students' safety and well-being. We continue to work closely with the Santa Barbara Police Department for city-based response and with the Sheriff's Office for consultation and support at county-adjacent campuses. Adding SROs or SRDs to our schools would reverse a deliberate policy choice made in partnership with our community, and we decline to do so.

Finding 5: Some schools in Santa Barbara County school districts lack adequate controls for visitor access.

Response: Disagree partially with an explanation. We cannot speak to conditions at other County schools. As applied to us, our visitor access controls are suited to our campuses and to the different purposes for which visitors come to them. Signage across every campus directs visitors to the front office to check in, and our check-in process matches the verification to the purpose of the visit. When a visitor seeks the release of a student, office staff require valid government-issued photo identification and verify the visitor against the authorized pickup list in our Aeries student information system. When a visitor arrives for a scheduled meeting or appointment, office staff confirm the purpose of the visit and issue a visible sticker-based badge, which we require visitors to display on campus. Office staff handle deliveries at the front office without campus access. Restraining orders and other legal restrictions affecting our students are logged in Aeries, and our site office staff are familiar with those on file. We describe the open design of our campuses, and the layered safety approach that design calls for, in our introduction above.

Recommendation 5a: The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts improve visitor access control during school hours by requiring valid government-issued photo identification verified by school personnel, utilizing a system that checks for restraining orders or other legal restrictions.

Response: Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule. By December 31, 2026, we will assess visitor check-in practices across all sites, identify and address any gaps, and provide the training and materials needed so that every site applies our check-in process consistently, including photo identification verified against the authorized pickup list in Aeries whenever a visitor seeks the release of a student. Restraining orders and other legal restrictions affecting our students are logged in our Aeries student information system; the number of active orders is limited, and our office staff at each site remain familiar with those on file, so that legal restrictions are identified through personnel knowledge working in tandem with our check-in process. To the extent the recommendation calls for photo identification of every visitor regardless of the purpose of the visit, we will not adopt that portion. Photo identification establishes who a visitor is; it does not establish whether that visitor has a legitimate reason to be on campus. Our check-in process ties verification to the purpose of the visit, which is where identification performs protective work.

Recommendation 5b: The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts require all schools to issue visitors a badge and require its visibility on the visitor while on campus during school hours.

Response: Has been implemented. We require all school sites to issue visitors a sticker-based badge at check-in and to require its visibility while on campus during school hours.

Finding 6: Not all schools in Santa Barbara County have adequate safety infrastructure, including fences, cameras, classrooms that lock from the inside, restricted access points, and instantaneous communication devices.

Response: Disagree partially with an explanation. We cannot speak to conditions at other County schools. As applied to us, our safety infrastructure is adequate. As described in our introduction, our campuses are open by design, and we secure them through layered measures suited to that design rather than through perimeter hardening. Our cameras, communications systems, restricted access points, and classroom locks are subject to ongoing site-level review and improvement, as further described in our response to Recommendation 6 below.

Recommendation 6: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts have each school conduct an annual security review with respect to video security cameras at key points across school grounds, two-way communications on campus, and innovations, such as artificial intelligence-aided technologies or drones, and make improvements based on those reviews.

Response: Has been implemented. Each of our school sites annually reviews their Comprehensive School Safety Plan, addressing video security cameras, two-way communications, physical infrastructure, and emerging technologies. Site administrators bring identified needs to the District office, which works with sites to fund and install improvements. Our current camera deployment (Verkada systems sized to campus, ranging from 1-5 cameras at elementary schools, 7-13 cameras at junior high schools, and 32-40 at high schools) reflects the outcome of these ongoing site-level reviews.

We thank the Grand Jury for its work on this report and for its focus on preparing our schools for the most difficult circumstances we hope never to face. We share the Grand Jury's commitment to student and staff safety and welcome continued dialogue as we build on the work already underway.

Sincerely,



Dr. Hilda Maldonado

Superintendent

Santa Barbara Unified School District